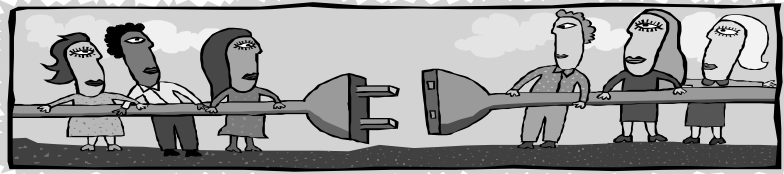


Consumer Connection



Informed Consumers, Quality Utility Services, and a Dedicated Organization for Missourians in the 21st Century

Issue 7 - July 2003

A quarterly publication of the Missouri Public Service Commission
Public Information & Education Department

Natural Gas Prices Are Still High.....Get Ready Now For Colder Weather

Customers who heat their homes with natural gas should prepare now for the very real possibility that it will cost them more to heat their homes during the winter of 2003-2004 than it did last year.

The Public Service Commission does not regulate the price that the local natural gas company pays to get natural gas for its customers. Wholesale natural gas prices are determined in an open, competition-based market and prices are currently at high levels. The Public Service Commission thoroughly reviews the purchasing practices of the local natural gas companies to ensure prudent decisions were made in obtaining natural gas for their customers.

Current temperatures in the mid-90s tend to keep people from thinking about this coming winter, but now is really the time to prepare for colder weather. **Take this opportunity to examine ways to cut down on energy usage.**

Customers should consider contacting their local utility company to see if they conduct home energy audits and what types of information is available to help make homes and/or businesses more energy efficient. Some customers may be eligible for weatherization assistance.

Have the furnace checked and tuned-up if needed and replace furnace filters each month if they are dirty. Identify safe measures that can keep homes/apartments warm without wasting energy. Examples include caulking and weatherstripping doors and windows that may leak air. In addition, add attic insulation if necessary.

Consumers should consider talking to their local utility company about a "budget" or "level" billing plan. These plans allow customers to pay equal monthly payments on their accounts. In addition, many Missouri gas and electric companies have other programs to assist their customers—ask about them. In most cases, companies will attempt to be somewhat flexible with customers to help avoid possible disconnection of service.

Since 1977, the Public Service Commission has required heat-related utility companies to adhere to the Commission's Cold Weather Rule, which is designed to help customers maintain heat-related service during the winter under certain circumstances. The PSC and your local utility company can also provide information on financial assistance programs available to consumers.

For more information on the Cold Weather Rule, call our Consumer Services Department at 1-800-392-4211.

POWER SURGES



A power surge is typically a sudden, sharp increase in voltage or current lasting less than a second.

Possible Causes:

Thunderstorms, lightning, downed power lines and/or poles, squirrels, birds, tree limbs, power line switches or reclosures, the operation of large industrial motors, or inadequate household wiring and/or grounding.

Prevention:

Have all indoor wiring inspected and repaired, if needed. Ensure all incoming service lines (phone, cable, satellite, etc.) are grounded and bonded with the electric utility ground.

Customers should consider using surge protection devices on all sensitive electronic equipment. These devices should be UL certified (1449), and have an energy dissipation rating of at least 900 joules (the higher the better).

Many electrical utilities offer a surge meter arrestor, a device that installs directly to the meter base. These arrestors employ a metal oxide varistor (MOV), which clamp the incoming voltage. The clamping voltage rating should not exceed 330 Volts. Typically, the utility enters into an agreement with a customer for a monthly fee and possibly an installation fee. This agreement includes the meter base arrestor and/or surge protection devices for sensitive equipment. The agreements usually provide for a fixed dollar amount to be reimbursed for damages incurred on each claim submitted, up to a specified overall limitation. The individual customer decides whether to participate in this program which is not regulated by the PSC.



Visit us at the fair!!

**Missouri State Fair
Sedalia, MO
August 7-17, 2003
Mathewson Building**



WATER QUALITY ISSUES

The Missouri Public Service Commission works in cooperation with the Department of Natural Resources to ensure that your water is safe and your service is acceptable.

Water Pressure Problems/Discoloration

■ State regulations require water utilities to provide a minimum of 20 pounds per square inch (PSI) water pressure at the point of delivery under normal flow conditions. Abnormal conditions such as water main breaks or high flows used for fire protection can substantially reduce pressure or even cause an outage.

■ Discoloration is most often caused by sediments that normally accumulate in water mains. Flushing the lines often solves the problem. Discoloration may also be the result of oxidation of iron or other minerals. If this is the case, chemical treatment may be necessary.

Water Main Breaks or Leaks in Pipes

■ If you discover a leak in a water line, you should know who is responsible for the costs of fixing it. In addition to the water mains, many water companies are responsible for the individual customer's pipeline that is connected to the main up to the customer's property line. Some utilities require customers to maintain the entire service line from the water main into the building. Most utilities do not maintain water service lines within the customers' property.

Estimated Charges & Meter Readings


■ Most water companies make every effort to read water meters regularly. However, not being able to access a customers' premises, or inclement weather may prevent timely reading of meters. In such cases, water usage may be estimated. Whether the estimate is high or low, any inaccuracies would be automatically corrected when the meter is actually read during a subsequent billing cycle. If there is an unusually inaccurate underestimation, resulting in a large bill after an actual reading, then customers could request a payment plan.

Do Your Homework

■ When buying a home, new owners should do their homework about the qualifications of their water suppliers, *before* they purchase the property. Check if the supplier is operated by the city, county or other entity. The PSC regulates the rates, fees and operating practices of 69 privately-owned water companies.

Coming Soon -- A New Icon



This is our new "information" icon -- you will notice it on our webpage soon. When you click on the  you will get a listing of all consumer-related information materials.



Local public hearings -- the PSC wants to hear from you . . .

AmerenUE has filed a \$26.7 million natural gas rate case with the Missouri Public Service Commission. For the average residential customer using natural gas for heating, the proposed increase would be approximately \$16.26 a month. (Case No. GR-2003-0517)

Missouri-American Water Company has filed a \$20 million a year rate case for water service and \$1,600 a year rate case for sewer service. This proposed increase would affect water customers in several districts: St. Charles, Brunswick, Joplin, Jefferson City, Mexico, Platte County, St. Louis County, St. Joseph and Warrensburg. The proposed sewer increase would affect approximately 100 sewer customers in Platte County. (Case No. WR-2003-0500)

Local public hearings will be held to receive customer comment on these proposals.
Watch your local paper or notices in your bill for the dates, times and locations.

For printed materials regarding a number of consumer issues or copies of this newsletter, please call 573-751-7491 or email joyceneuner@psc.state.mo.us

Who to Contact:

Missouri Public Service Commission
Consumer Hotline **1-800-392-4211**
or email: pscinfo@psc.state.mo.us
visit our website: www.psc.mo.gov

Mail your inquiry or complaint to:

Missouri Public Service Commission
Consumer Services Department
P.O. Box 360
Jefferson City, MO 65102-0360

